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ABSTRACT

Louise Rosenblatt differentiates between two reading transactions: efferent reading, or concentrating on the information in a text, and aesthetic reading, a holistic process by which the reader "lives through" a text-world event. Current research in the whole language approach to reading instruction attests to the growing stature of aesthetic reading. Teachers should seek classroom approaches that foster a holistic evocation of literary texts, and one methodology for doing this involves the use of imagery. First, imagery fosters the fusion of cognition and affect, a process crucial to aesthetic reading. Secondly, the holistic and synchronic nature of imagery indicates its importance for nurturing global contextualization. Research indicates that imagery is by its very nature holistic. To investigate the function of imagery in aesthetic reading, 30 hours of protocols produced by 5 subjects engaged in pleasure reading were examined to determine how these readers used imagery to enhance their aesthetic transactions with the texts. Based on the results, a series of activities were elaborated which would foster readers' emotional involvement with texts. First, students were asked to pause at intervals to record the images evoked as students read; second, they were asked to draw any memorable image they had of the text-world--a focus on imagery which provided imagistic gaps; and third, students were asked to write a description of what the story felt like to them because describing images instead of assigning meaning allowed the students to be flexible. Class discussion augments these activities, after which students return to the texts. Drawings of images were created by the students and shared with the class, amid much laughter. The intensely recursive movements within aesthetic reading can be fostered by utilizing these and similar methods which focus on imagery. (HB)

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# Seeing, Feeling, Evoking:
## Imagery and Aesthetic Involvement

Louise Rosenblatt differentiates between two reading transactions: efferent reading and aesthetic reading. Efferent reading, the focus of most experimental reading research and instruction, occurs when we concentrate on the information we wish to take away from a text. It results in what James Britton calls piecemeal contextualization: taking bits and pieces of meaning to use outside of the text ("Spectator"). Aesthetic reading, on the other hand, occurs when we fuse the cognitive and affective processes cued by a text so that we seemingly "live through" a text-world event. It is a holistic process, resulting in what Britton calls global contextualization: melding all elements into a gestalt that is greater than the sum of its parts ("Spectator").

While no one denies the necessity of efferent reading in our information rich age, aesthetic reading has been credited with less importance. It has been at once conflated with efferent reading and reduced to a mere pleasurable, almost elitist pursuit. However, the growing interest in literature from reading scholars specializing in a whole language approach to reading instruction attests to the growing stature of aesthetic reading, as does its increasing role in the literacy effort.



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Those of us who entered English studies through our passion for living within the pages of a book instinctively know the value of aesthetic reading. For the desire to experience other lives, or, in the words of Britton, to live more than the one alotted to us ("Response"), is the basis of life-long reading. Therefore, we need to create classroom approaches that go beyond the cognitive, analytical processes of efferent reading to foster a holistic evocation of literary texts, the heart of aesthetic reading. One powerful methodology for nurturing an aesthetic rather than an efferent stance rests with the use of imagery--the experience of sensations in the absence of physical stimuli.

First, imagery fosters the fusion of cognition and affect, a process crucial to aesthetic reading. Susan Aylwin in Structures in Thought and Feelings posits inseparable connections between cognition and affect in imagery. For instance, Aylwin hypothesizes three modes of representation: enactive--which results in scenarios and actions; visual--which results in static mental pictures; and verbal--which results in language-based propositions. While affect is an integral element of each mode, it is particularly powerful in visual and enactive representations. Other studies have also linked affect to imagery, suggesting that it accompanies affect (Lyman), serves as internal triggers for emotions (Plutchik), or regulates emotions (Suler).

Second, the holistic and synchronic nature of imagery indicates its importance for nurturing global rather than

piecemeal contextualization. Suzanne Langer in Philosphy in a New Key notes the nondiscursive nature of imagery. Visual forms present their constituents simultaneously, and the "relations determining a visual structure are grasped in one act of vision" (93). Such a structure is "understood only through the meaning of the whole" (97).

Similarly, Canadian psychologist Allan Paivio contends that imagery, an essential part of cognition, is by its very nature holistic. According to Paivio, stimuli is represented both visually and linguistically, but in distinctively different ways. In Mental Representations, an update of his dual-coding theory presented in 1971, Paivio explains that information encoded imagistically is organized synchronically (as opposed to the sequential organization of the linguistic system), with smaller units embedded in larger units. The entire memory configuration is available for use more or less all at once, like elements of a fabric. In addition, Paivio asserts a direct relationship between imagery and emotions, claiming that imagery can become "the conceptual peg for the predominant passion," a term he borrows from Coleridge to describe the role of emotion in the creative process ("Mind's Eye" 14). This holistic fusion of cognition and affect is a hallmark of aesthetic reading.

While this body of research indicates the powerful role that imagery may play in aesthetic reading, it does not specify how imagery might contribute to the fusion of cognition and affect. To investigate the function of imagery in aesthetic reading, I

examined over 30 hours of protocols produced by five subjects engaged in pleasure reading. Recurring patterns indicate three ways that these readers used imagery to enhance their aesthetic transactions with literary texts.

First, images provided concrete anchors for inchoate emotions and abstractions. The five readers in my study evoked images of text-cued characters, events, symbols, etc., then used memories, ideas and feelings associated with those images to add depth to their text-world evocations. These imagistic pegs also allowed the readers to actualize a difficult concept in concrete form, then interact and reshape it, something not always possible when the idea or feeling remained an unrealized abstraction.

Second, imagery allowed the readers to exercise temporal control over a narrative sequence. One manifestation of this control was visual updating, an imagistic parallel to linguistic updating (Beaugrande & Dressler), in which the readers evoked images of a story's ongoing action, then revised those images as cues from the text warranted. Visual projecting was also used to envision the possible course of future action, serving as the basis of narrative expectation.

Third, imagery appeared to mediate between cognitive and affective processes. Readers frequently used images as a bridge between affect and cognition, especially when the readers sought to evoke complex character motivations.

Based on this preliminary research, I evolved a series of activities that I use in my classes to foster readers' emotional

involvement with a text. The first activity is a modification of the more typical response statements. At pre-determined intervals in a poem or short story, usually close to the beginning, mid-point, and end, I ask my students to pause and record descriptions of a character, event, or setting evoked by the text. The second activity occurs after they have finished the selection, but prior to any discussion. I ask them to describe any memorable images they have of the text-world and then to draw a strong image. For the third activity I ask them to write a description of what the story feels like to them.

The first activity, the progression of images recorded as students read, serves three purposes. First, it forces the readers to concentrate on evocations of the text world, not on any explication of what those evocations mean. Thus, by concentrating on images, students must evoke a text world before analyzing it. To illustrate, Kathy described the following sequence of images evoked in response to "The Blue Stones" by Isak Dinesen.

1. I picture the skipper, his wife and the figure head. The figure is wooden and similar in appearance to the wife--but the image captures the physical beauty. The wife, in person, doesn't stand as proudly as the figure-head, but has a body posture that reveals her anxiety.

2. I picture the wife as more bitter and angry. The blue stones are bright and lustrous, they twinkle when used as the eyes for the figure. The skipper is frustrated that his wife doesn't understand the importance of the figure-head to him. I pucture him animated--moving his arms as he talks to her. I picture her brooding, arms folded across her chest, tapping her foot as he states the stones are for the eyes of the statue and not for her for earrings. The blue glass is dull in the eyes of the figure, there is almost a sadness in the blue glass instead of the pride

that was there with the blue stones.

3. I picture the wife, defeated and desperate because she had caused destruction through her own deception. The woman seems small. The wise woman seemed older and craggly but compassionate to me.

Although some comments border on interpretation, something not unexpected in aesthetic reading since response and interpretation interweave the evocation of a text-world, the predominant concentration is on creating a world peopled by characters with emotions and motivations: the husband is frustrated, the wife is anxious, then brooding, defeated, and desperate.

Second, the focus on imagery provides imagistic gaps, similar to linguistic gaps, but more easily filled. As readers describe their images, they import information not explicitly cued by the text. As Kathy's example illustrates, readers ascribe motivations, expressions, postures, spatial relationships, and physical contexts not specified by the text, thereby deepening their involvement in this evoked world. Chris described his first image as, "The wife is worn, weathered and not appreciated by the skipper, as much as the ship is." Tanya said she pictured "an Irish sailor who is middle-aged with red hair and a beard. His wife is plain with pretty blond hair and I think of it taking place in the early 19th century." Students described animated gestures, despairing postures, eyes white and cataract-covered, and husband and wife talking but never touching.

Third, describing images instead of assigning meaning allows

the readers to be flexible. Images seem to have greater elasticity than a linguistic interpretation has. So readers can alter and reshape their images more so than they might any verbal representation of meaning. One common reshaping connected with "The Blue Stones" occurred between the first and second recorded images. For instance, in Kathy's description, the wife was at first anxious, then bitter and angry, indicating a change in Kathy's evocation of the wife. Many students, most of them women, created initial images that reflected sympathy for and empathy with the wife. In fact, Tanya rather hotly condemned the husband for being a "chauvinist pig." However, by the second description, these students had revised their images to reflect greater sympathy for the husband or a more balanced response to the characters. Some continued to reshape their images of the characters, particularly motivations, until the only sympathetic "character" was the ship's figurehead.

The second activity, describing the memorable image and creating a drawing, serves as the basis for class discussion. These images provide anchors, allowing readers to entertain alternative visions, consider options and changes, but without losing a sense of their starting points. Readers can expand their "horizon of possibilities" (Iser, qtd. in Langer, J.) without getting hopelessly lost in those possibilities. And unlike a linguistic representation with its linear, bound meaning, imagistic meaning, replete with fuzzy boundaries and layered significance, provides freedom of movement. It seems to

function as a link between Sondra Perl's amorphous felt sense and a flexible assumption of shared meaning, linguistically signaled by the frequent repetition of "you know" in the give and take of class talk.

To explore this realm of possibilities, we share the remembered image and the drawn image, then retrace our steps imagistically and textually, pursuing a kind of retrospective structuring. By turn, students describe their progression of images, then attempt to tie that progression to their final image. In the process of doing this, we begin to sense the different designs shaping our text-world evocations. For instance, some students represented the skipper as crafty, double-dealing, and worshipping a wooden mistress. Others represented the woman as stern, scrawny, hook nosed, bitter and angry. At one extreme, a student wrote, "I would kill my husband if he won a mink coat and decided to use it as a seat cover for his truck instead of giving it to me," while many castigated the wife for her lack of sensitivity. These differences in evoked images provide an opportunity for us to share different visions cued by the same text.

So, next, students return to the text itself to recover the particular cues that led to their individual visions. As we do this, we have the opportunity to literally re-see our text-worlds and Dinesen's text through the eyes of our classmates. Also, it gives us the chance to re-examine our images from the vantage point of the additions and transformations we individually made

to create our particular text world. This process serves two underlying purposes: first, it emphasizes that any text-world we create is one guided by our perceptions of the text, and, second, that "the text" itself is not a discrete thing, but a matrix of potentials that we shape in both communal and individualistic ways.

Finally, we share our drawings, amid much laughter, and explain what we were attempting to illustrate. These explications frequently provide a verbal bridge to a discussion of the third activity: the description of what the story feels like. For example, Maggie drew a stick figure of a woman in the middle of inked waves. She explained that she wanted to draw "the wife on the wedding night looking like the figurehead." Her description of what the story felt like echoed and elaborated that explanation:

> What it feels like--Jeez, kinda hits home. It makes me see that perhaps I've become a stern wife for my husband, maybe I changed from the wild, free spirit I used to be and have become someone who keeps her hair up under her cap and won't let it down. Maybe I'm jealous of what my husband remembers me being. I felt the wife was jealous of her husband's memories of her.

Such a description, especially built on previous discussions, begins the effort to transform into language the reader's sense of a text's design. Rather than talking about the meaning of the text or an interpretation, we talk about the

design we create in which each element has a place and significance. The point is not to "guess" what the story means, but to decide what our evocations mean. Thus, meaning is treated as something not in the text itself, but as a fusion of text and reader; nor is it something unchanging, but as variable as the images engendering it.

The intensely recursive movements within aesthetic reading, interweaving evocation, response, and interpretation, fusing cognition and affect, can be fostered by the use of imagery. Treating imagery as starting point, anchor, and motif, can enable students to "live through" their text worlds before analyzing them. And perhaps that is the most important contribution of all. Focusing on imagery prevents the students from playing automatically the game of "guess what it means." It challenges reading habits created by schooling which privileges analysis and explication over holistic engagement. Finally, it helps us to live in other worlds, experience other lives. And without that experience, how can we begin to ascribe meaning to those lives?

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